



Creolization processes in the later south Scandinavian Neolithic An approach to cultural heterogeneity

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The background of the cover is a photograph of a large, grey, moss-covered rock formation. The rock has several small, dark, circular markings on its surface. In the background, there is a clear blue sky, some distant trees, and a small red-roofed building. The foreground shows dry, brown grass.

NEOLITHIC DIVERSITIES

**Perspectives from
a conference in
Lund, Sweden**

Edited by

Kristian Brink

Susan Hydén

Kristina Jennbert

Lars Larsson

Deborah Olausson



The members of the conference “What’s New in the Neolithic”, May 2013. Photo by Kristina Jennbert.

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Neolithic Diversities

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Editors:

Kristian Brink, Susan Hydén,
Kristina Jennbert, Lars Larsson & Deborah Olausson

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Cover photo: The dolmen at Hofterup, western Scania. Photo by Kristina Jennbert 2012

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Preface

In the study of the distant human past, certain events and periods have come to represent decisive passages from one human state to another. From a global perspective, the characteristic feature of the last ten thousand years is that people in different parts of the world, and at different points in time, started to grow plants and domesticate animals. The rise and dissemination of agriculture were crucial factors for the continued existence of humankind on earth. The incipient agriculture is often regarded as the very beginning of human *culture*, as it has traditionally been perceived in western historiography, that is, as control over nature and the “cultivation” of intellectual abilities.

As a result of the increasing national and international interest in the northern European Neolithic (4000–2000 BC), combined with large-scale archaeological excavations which helped to nuance and modify the picture of the period, senior researchers and research students formed a Neolithic group in 2010. The Department of Archaeology and Ancient History at Lund University served as the base, but the group also included collaborators from Linnaeus University and Södertörn University, and from the Southern Contract Archaeology Division of the National Heritage Board in Lund and Sydsvensk Arkeologi in Malmö and Kristianstad.

Meetings and excursions in the following two years resulted in the holding of an interna-

tional conference in Lund in May 2013 entitled “What’s New in the Neolithic”. Invitations to this conference were sent to two dozen prominent Neolithic scholars from northern and central Europe.

The conference was a great success, with presentations and discussions of different aspects of innovative research on the Neolithic. The members of the Neolithic group took an active part in the discussions following the presentations.

It was decided before the conference that the papers would be published. The members of the Neolithic group also had the opportunity to contribute current research to this publication.

After the conference an editorial group was set up, consisting of Dr Kristian Brink, PhD student Susan Hydén, Professor Kristina Jennbert, Professor Lars Larsson and Professor Deborah Olausson.

A grant was received from Riksbankens Jubileumsfond for the meetings and excursions of the Neolithic group 2010–2013. We would like to thank The Royal Swedish Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities and Berit Wallenbergs Stiftelse for grants which enabled us to hold the conference “What’s New in the Neolithic”. Grants from The Royal Swedish Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities, and Stiftelsen Elisabeth Rausing’s Minnesfond financed the layout and printing of this publication.

I. PERSPECTIVES ON PEOPLE, IDENTITY AND PRACTICE

Creolization processes in the later south Scandinavian Neolithic

An approach to cultural heterogeneity

Rune Iversen

Abstract

This paper approaches the cultural heterogeneity of the later South Scandinavian Neolithic. South Scandinavia experienced a very uneven development in the course of the 3rd millennium BC, with a variety of archaeologically defined cultures. This situation has resulted in the application of a “culture-centred” approach by which individual “cultures” have been thoroughly analysed but without the achievement of a coherent understanding of the cultural heterogeneity of the period. This paper questions the application of dogmatic cultural labelling and proposes the use of creolization theory to explain the blurred cultural situation that followed the Funnel Beaker era in eastern Denmark and lasted until the onset of the Late Neolithic when a new period of incipient cultural homogeneity began.

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Introduction

IN SOUTH SCANDINAVIA the beginning of the Neolithic is defined by the presence of domesticated crops and the occurrence of the Funnel Beaker culture around 4000 BC, which remained the sole archaeological culture throughout the 4th millennium BC in the region. From around 3000 BC we see significant changes in the material culture, including new types of pottery, battle-axes, arrowheads, changed settlement patterns, subsistence economic practices and burial customs. These changes are generally related to the appearance of new Middle Neolithic “cultures” including the Pitted Ware culture, the Swedish-Norwegian Battle-Axe culture and the Single Grave culture covering a Jutland variant and an east Danish variant.

The term Single Grave culture was introduced by Sophus Müller in 1913 in order to describe a certain type of burials on the Jutland

Peninsula consisting of low burial mounds with stratified single graves holding stone battle-axes and cord-decorated beakers (Müller 1898; 1913). Some 20 years later, Carl Johan Becker analysed the contemporary and multifaceted assemblage of finds recovered from eastern Denmark and introduced the term “the Single Grave culture of the Danish Islands” (Becker 1936).

The abundance of archaeological cultures defined within the later part of the south Scandinavian Neolithic has to a wide extent resulted in a “culture-centred” approach. Thus, research has mainly been focused on individual cultures and associated aspects such as culture-specific burial customs, settlement patterns etc. I do not consider such an approach mistaken, but standing alone it appears inadequate if one wishes to explain the cultural heterogeneity of the later Neolithic period, as is the purpose of this paper.

Cultural heterogeneity in the 3rd millennium BC

As indicated by some recent ¹⁴C dates (e.g. Andersen 2008, p. 39; Skousen 2008, pp. 207 ff.), the late Funnel Beaker culture coexisted with the Pitted Ware culture, the Jutland Single Grave culture and the Swedish-Norwegian Battle-Axe culture on a regional level for a couple of hundred years during the early 3rd millennium BC. The late Funnel Beaker culture was the dominant material culture group at the beginning of the millennium, with features like Store Valby pottery and thick-butted A-axes spread across Denmark. However, viewed from a pottery-based perspective, one could ask if the Store Valby phase should be regarded as a part of the Funnel Beaker complex at all.

The plain bucket-shaped vessels, the thick and coarsely tempered ware and the scarce and simple ornamentation clearly distinguish the Store Valby pottery from the earlier and far more elegant and elaborate Funnel Beaker styles. Artistically we are facing a degeneration phase, which in my view mirrors a general transformation of the late Funnel Beaker societies that includes a gradual incorporation of various new material elements. The occurrence of the Store Valby pottery is in itself an indication of this development as it shares some bucket-shaped vessel types with the western Globular Amphora group (cf. Davidsen 1978, p. 174 f.).

The downgrading of the visual and stylistic aspects of pottery was not unique to early 3rd millennium BC southern Scandinavia and northern Germany but can also be found in many other later Neolithic styles, such as Horgen (Switzerland) and Seine-Oise-Marne (northern France/southern Belgium) pottery (Whittle 1996, p. 283).

Even though the Store Valby style covered most parts of present-day Denmark, we see a clear disintegration of the Funnel Beaker culture

from around or a little before 3000 BC. One example is the appearance of the stone packing graves in northern and western Jutland, c. 3100–2800 BC. The stone packing graves show similarities to both the wagon burials of the Yamnaya culture of the Pontic-Caspian steppes and the cattle burials of the Baden and Globular Amphora complexes, including the Złota group of southern Poland (Whittle 1996, p. 136, pp. 211 ff.; Johannsen & Laursen 2010).

The disintegration of the Funnel Beaker culture can furthermore be seen in the differentiation of pottery styles such as the north Jutland Ferslev style, the Bundsø/Lindø style of the Danish Islands, the Karlsfält/Stävie group in Scania and the Vasagård and Grødby styles on Bornholm. However, the most far-reaching trend within the late Funnel Beaker pottery is the development of the south Scandinavian Pitted Ware tradition (M. Larsson 2006; Iversen 2010).

Material culture changes did not only show in the form of new pottery styles but also in the occurrence of tanged Pitted Ware arrowheads and in the shaping of flint axes. Thick-butted flint axes appeared from the onset of the 3rd millennium BC and can be divided into two chronologically overlapping types (A and B) (Nielsen 1979). Whereas A-axes are spread throughout southern Scandinavia and are related to Funnel Beaker contexts, B-axes are concentrated in Scania and eastern Denmark where they occur on late Funnel Beaker and Pitted Ware sites, sometimes together with A-axes. Besides, B-axes are affiliated with the technically poorer thick-butted flint axe of the Single Grave culture.

There is no doubt that the B-axes derive from the A-axes and that these represent a further development of the chronological earlier thin-butted axes. Thus, the thick-butted flint axes are clearly rooted in the Funnel Beaker flint tradition. The development of B-axes must be related to the disintegrated late Funnel Beaker

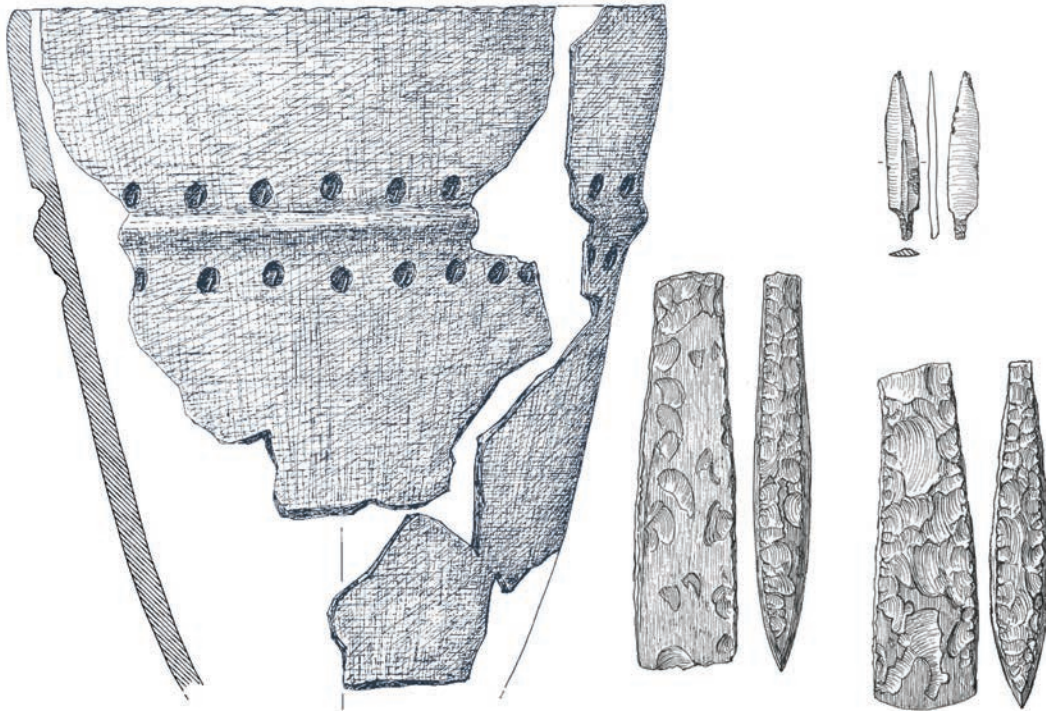


Fig. 1. Material culture of the early 3rd millennium BC. Store Valby vessel, tanged arrowhead and thick-butted flint axes. After Ebbesen 1975, figs. 234, 245; Davidsen 1978, pl. 62. Drawing by H. Ørsnes.

milieu that appeared in eastern Denmark and Scania during the early 3rd millennium BC (Fig. 1).

In addition to the artefact types discussed above, a few scattered finds of early Single Grave type battle-axes occurred in east Denmark (Zealand and adjacent islands) as Single Grave communities started to appear on the Jutland Peninsula from around 2850 BC (Glob 1945, figs. 1–16). Some of the Single Grave beakers found in east Denmark might be contemporary with the late Funnel Beaker milieu. Besides, a restricted number of vessels from the Globular Amphora and Elbe-Havel cultures are known from southeastern Denmark. Even though these different elements can be explained as single imports, the result of direct exchange in the form of gifts, migration of individuals or exogamic relations, they introduce ideas and

mindsets different from those of the Funnel Beaker culture and are thus parts of an increasing disintegration of the Funnel Beaker world.

The general impression of the archaeological record in eastern Denmark in the early 3rd millennium BC is a mixture of different cultural elements brought together within the context of the late Funnel Beaker culture.

The shaping of new cultural identities and the choice of terminology

A very rich vocabulary exists when it comes to the description of the fusion of cultural traits including: *hybridization*, *syncretism*, *ethnogenesis*, *acculturation*, *assimilation*, *creolization* etc. Most of this terminology takes its point of departure in the description of the European colonialism in the Americas and the creation of

African-American/African-Caribbean societies in the 18th and 19th century AD.

Acculturation, assimilation and creolization are among the terms that have been applied in archaeological research (e.g. Okun 1989; L. Larsson 1998; Webster 2001; Bergstøl 2004). I think it is worth considering some of the slight differences associated with the two main terms: acculturation and creolization. At some point there is a tendency within cultural anthropology to use the term acculturation to describe asymmetric power relations in which one society is dominant in proportion to another. Such a superior-subordinate relationship often leads to the assimilation/absorption of the subordinate culture into the dominant one. Thus, acculturation often leads to assimilation (Ember & Ember 2011, pp. 29 ff.). I do not find that such asymmetric power relations are consistent with the actual situation we face at the onset of the 3rd millennium BC and I will therefore leave the acculturation/assimilation terminology out of account.

Creolization, on the other hand, is a linguistic term that describes the blending of two or more languages into a new language. Creolization also has a hint of the above-mentioned asymmetrical power relations as it initially was used to describe the emergence of European and African mixed languages resulting from the import of African slaves by the European colonial powers. However, the concept of creolization has a historical dimension to it that I think is highly applicable when we wish to describe and explain the fusion of cultural traits into new and mixed cultural expressions.

Creole languages often emerge from some kind of pidgin, which is the initial blend of two or more parent languages. Whereas creoles are defined by being natural languages having their own native speakers, a rich vocabulary and developed grammar, pidgin is a rudimentary language that is often limited to certain functions or domains. All pidgin speakers will

also have a native language of their own but as pidgin is learnt by new generations as a primary language it becomes a creole (Baptista 2005, p. 34).

The disintegration of the Funnel Beaker culture

I think that the concepts of pidginization and creolization offer very useful frames for understanding the cultural situation in east Denmark during the early 3rd millennium BC. Creolization theory provides us with an approach by which we can capture the cultural substance behind an otherwise culturally blurred archaeological record. Creole languages are diversified and shaped through non-homogeneous processes involving a range of complex mechanisms that are dependent on factors such as the identity of the interacting agents. Similarly, cultural creolization is not a unified process resulting in a single creolized blend (a new normative culture) but rather in a series of interacting subcultures (Ferguson 1992, pp. xli ff.; Webster 2001, p. 218; Baptista 2005, p. 39). Thus, from around 3000 BC onwards a series of new material culture trends were obtained by the indigenous Funnel Beaker culture in a process I will describe as cultural pidginization, which in the course of time resulted in creole communities.

The palisade enclosures of the early 3rd millennium BC probably played an important role as social arenas and facilitators of this cultural transformation process. The palisades, in my opinion, can best be explained as products of the Funnel Beaker tradition of constructing large ritual gathering sites (cf. the earlier causewayed enclosures). Traces of early Battle-Axe and Pitted Ware material culture found in connection with the palisades show how people obtained new material elements within an overall Funnel Beaker cultural and ritual framework materialized in the palisade enclosures. Thus,

the incorporation of new cultural elements was not done uncritically as it had to be legitimized in accordance with old norms and traditions. A somewhat similar scenario is also visible at the Alvastra Pile Dwelling in Östergötland, Middle Sweden, where Pitted Ware material culture and lifestyle was adopted within a ritual and constructional Funnel Beaker setting (cf. M. Larsson 2007; Lagerås 2008; Brink 2009, pp. 324 ff.; Browall 2011, pp. 412 ff.).

Likewise, the megalithic tombs might have worked as transformers of culturally alien objects. People placed Pitted Ware tanged arrowheads, Single Grave beakers and battle-axes in the megalithic tombs and by doing so they introduced new material forms within a well established setting continuing and accentuating Funnel Beaker customs. My view is that the Funnel Beaker worldview, ritual traditions, burial customs and social organization continued relatively unaltered and functioned as a cultural basis during most of the 3rd millennium BC. On this foundation new material elements were obtained, creating a series of interacting subcultures characterized by e.g. different pottery styles and subsistence economic strategies.

On the basis of the material and cultural diversification that took place during the early 3rd millennium BC, I conceive the late Funnel Beaker milieu as an expression of an incipient creolization process or what we can term cultural pidginization. This is first and foremost seen in the development of various late Funnel Beaker pottery styles (including the “degenerate” Store Valby style), the B-axe complex and the incorporation of Pitted Ware tanged arrowheads (types A–C) (see Fig. 1). These material elements were influenced by, or related to, various cultural groups (Globular Amphora, Funnel Beaker, Pitted Ware) forming what I conceive as a new rudimentary material “language”. It is from this culturally pidginized milieu that new creole communities emerged as

the Funnel Beaker complex finally ceased and Corded Ware/Single Grave influences became predominant in east Denmark.

After the Funnel Beakers

From around 2600 BC Corded Ware objects appeared in east Denmark in larger numbers than hitherto seen. What we see is neither the adoption of the material culture of the Jutland Single Grave culture nor that of the Swedish Battle-Axe culture but rather a mix of the two combined with few Pitted Ware elements and continued underlying Funnel Beaker traditions.

The material culture that characterizes the final Middle Neolithic, c. 2600–2350 BC, in east Denmark is primarily thick-butted flint adzes, late tanged arrowheads (type D) and a relatively limited number of Corded Ware beakers and Single Grave type stone battle-axes. The curved beakers and late battle-axes found in eastern Denmark can be compared to those of eastern Schleswig-Holstein and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern rather than those of the Jutland Single Grave core area of west-central Jutland or Battle-Axe culture Sweden. It is noteworthy that no straight-walled beakers, which otherwise account for more than half of the Single Grave funerary pottery on the Jutland Peninsula, have been found in east Denmark. Likewise, no Swedish Battle-Axe vessels are known from Denmark, showing that a separate pottery tradition was created in east Denmark strictly demarcating the area from the Jutland Single Grave culture and the Battle-Axe culture.

Furthermore, we see no significant increase in the number of battle-axes in east Denmark, as was the case within the Jutland Single Grave area. In east Denmark, the battle-axes are mainly recorded as stray finds but they also occur in wetlands and in megalithic tombs. This find situation is very unlike that of the Jutland Peninsula where battle-axes were part of the grave

goods in more than 1100 single graves (Hübner 2005, p. 605).

What we see is the selective adoption, transformation and use of new material elements in accordance with underlying Funnel Beaker norms. If we apply the linguistic concepts of creolization to the situation in east Denmark then the “grammar” (rules of usage, or in cultural creolization the way material things are made, used and perceived) remained principally Funnel Beaker culture whereas the “lexicon” (words, or the artefacts) appears to be Single Grave culture (cf. Ferguson 1992, p. xlii). However, the Funnel Beaker “grammar”, or norms as I will prefer to call it, did not only affect the way artefacts were used but also to a high degree burial customs and deposition practices.

Burial customs are influenced by a range of cultural norms, political strategies and beliefs and are associated with various funerary rituals and sometimes elaborate architecture (Pearson 2003). When it comes to burial customs too, the final Middle Neolithic societies in east Denmark differentiated themselves from the rest of south Scandinavia. Compared with more than 1500 recorded burial sites on the Jutland Peninsula holding close to 2400 single graves, the handful of east Danish sites with single graves seems almost negligible (Iversen 2013).

Instead of adopting the Single Grave burial custom, people of east Denmark preferred the old megalithic tombs, which indicates a great deal of consistency concerning mortuary practice and ritual behaviour. This consistency is significant as the way people choose to bury their dead is closely associated with cultural practices, heritage and religious beliefs. Rituals tend to be rather conservative, preserving ways of doing things, which is particularly true for funerary rites and mortuary practices, even though rapid changes can occur (Pearson 2003, p. 195). Thus, the active continuation, or change, of burial practice must be regarded as a weighty indicator of the cultural affiliation

and self-understanding of a given social group.

The consistency seen in the burial practice is also visible in the ritual norms that governed the deposition practice. Flint axes/adzes continued to be deposited throughout the Middle Neolithic in east Denmark, showing that the ritual norms of the late Funnel Beaker culture were continued.

The creolization of south Scandinavia

A continued low frequency of stone battle-axes, an almost total rejection of the individual Single Grave burial custom, continued flint axe/adze depositions and reuse of megalithic tombs clearly show the continuation of old Funnel Beaker norms throughout the late Middle Neolithic. Not only was the “Funnel Beaker way” actively upheld by the reuse of megalithic tombs, it probably also constituted the underlying socio-structural backbone of the final Middle Neolithic societies of east Denmark. The old Funnel Beaker norms governed the adoption and rejection of material culture elements including types of objects, the restricted use of battle-axes, mortuary and depositional practices and contact networks.

The reason why east Denmark so conservatively upheld the Funnel Beaker norms must be found in the area's old position as “megalithic heartland”, which reached back to the early 4th millennium BC when dolmens and passage graves were constructed in very large numbers. As the Funnel Beaker culture ceased and new Corded Ware customs gained a foothold in northern Europe, material elements were adopted and transformed through a cultural creolization process creating what has otherwise been termed “the Single Grave culture of the Danish Islands” (cf. Becker 1936). However, with a limited number of battle-axes and the lack of single graves, one can hardly talk about a Single Grave culture in east Denmark

(Iversen forthcoming). This reasoning brings us to the question of what to call this cultural expression otherwise known as the Single Grave culture of the Danish Islands.

My view on this question is that nothing much is gained by just adding another cultural label to the rich collection of Middle Neolithic cultures. Instead of “inventing” a new culture, I think that we should see this cultural expression as the result of the creolization process described above. This process took place in east Denmark and neighbouring areas and was caused by the combination of strong local identities rooted in the regional position as megalithic Funnel Beaker heartland and new Single Grave culture influences. The creolization process was made possible by an increasing disintegration (cultural pidginization) of the late Funnel Beaker culture during the early 3rd millennium BC shown by the emergence of the Store Valby pottery and associated late local Funnel Beaker styles and Pitted Ware elements (see Fig. 1).

A somewhat similar creolization process to that described for east Denmark can also be found in other parts of south Scandinavia. Local communities in eastern Jutland, on Funen, in northeastern Schleswig-Holstein and northern Mecklenburg-Vorpommern saw much of the same development. However, these areas were more influenced by the overall Corded Ware complex, or the Single Grave culture of e.g. westcentral Jutland, than east Denmark.

The creolized communities that evolved in east Denmark from c. 2600 BC were in a wider sense affiliated with, or at least influenced by, the overall Corded Ware complex but they used the new material culture trends in accordance with old Funnel Beaker traditions. In the old Pitted Ware areas of northeastern Denmark, elements from the Pitted Ware complex and lifestyle were continued.

This scenario presents a culturally blurred and complex picture and challenges the preva-

lent rigid view of prehistoric cultures as closed self-sustained units, each occupying its time period and geographical area. With the application of creolization theory it has been possible to put forward an interpretation of an archaeological material and a period that has been poorly understood and appeared fragmentary and associated with cultural decline.

At the end of the culturally diversified Middle Neolithic, new Late Neolithic material and cultural trends came to influence south Scandinavia, and in the long term created a new and far more homogeneous cultural expression known from the Early Bronze Age.

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